

Transforming Daily
“ . . . My brethren . . . ”
Matthew 25:40

I am often asked about giving to the poor or needy. Whether it is the man or woman on the street corner or whether it is the frequent visit in the church office or to the church services by someone who says they need food, gas, and lodging, money for house or rent payment, money for gas or heat payment, etc., the question arises, “Should I give when someone approaches me and asks me for money, someone I don’t know or aren’t affiliated with?” My response is always the same and from some perspectives, maybe harsh.

I tell people three things. The first thing I tell them is that it is up to them personally whether they give or not. It shouldn’t depend on whether I give or not or what I even think about the matter. I sometimes ask them, “How has God impressed your heart in the matter?” The second thing I say, and one of the most important things, is no matter what you choose to do, be safe in doing it. Many people have been taken advantage of, hurt and killed as a result of “someone in need.” So, while it is noble to give, and you are practicing being harmless as a dove in doing so, don’t forget the other part of that axiom to be as wise as a serpent.

The third thing I tell anyone interested in my opinion on giving to the poor or needy, and this is what some people think is harsh, is that the gospel ministry is not the same thing as a “social gospel.” Jesus did not come nor establish His church to meet the needs of society. As a matter of fact Jesus said, “For you have the poor with you always.” It doesn’t mean that we aren’t to minister to the poor or needy, but the biggest need the poor or needy have (and for that matter everyone has) is for a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Jesus did not come to settle socio-economic and political problems. He came to seek and to save that which was lost. Yes, it is a matter of Scripture that before a hungry man will receive instruction; first his belly must be filled. That is why this kind of giving must be a personal choice after godly discernment. However, in this text of Matthew, Jesus is very clear that He is speaking of the brethren. Brethren are fellow believers, not just anyone off the street (and if you have talked to many people just off the street and on street corners, almost all of them “know” Jesus, but just try to get them into church and to be a part of your fellowship to bare equitable responsibility commensurate with the privilege they are requesting from you or the church).

The giving that the believer is to do is first and foremost for the spread of the gospel. Whether it is time, talent or tithe, our resources are to be invested in that which will plant, water and harvest souls for the kingdom of God. Why do you give? Is it to clear your conscience? Why do you give? Is it to be seen as one who cares? Why do you give? Is it to try to repay some previous debt that you owe?

I’m not saying not to give to the poor or needy, but if you’re going to (outside of the purpose of soul winning) why not start where the Bible says we should start with true widows and orphans. Remember that when you give, Jesus said that you did it to Him when you did it for the least of “My brethren.”